



White House: ISIS Solely Responsible for Moscow Attack, no Ukraine Involvement

The Islamic State bears sole responsibility for the deadly attack near Moscow on March 22 and there was no Ukrainian involvement, U.S. National Security Council spokesperson Adrienne Watson claimed on March 23.

The Crocus City Hall in Krasnogorsk in Moscow's western outskirts was attacked by gunmen on the evening of March 22 — just before a concert by Russian rock band Picnic, when the venue, which has an estimated capacity of 7,500, was nearly full. The attackers, armed with semiautomatic rifles, breached the venue's entrances, shooting patrons at point-blank range and then setting the building on fire before fleeing the scene. The incident led to the deaths of at least 143 people.



AP Images
Crocus City Hall after attack

The U.S. government early this month shared information with Russia about a planned attack in Moscow and also issued a public advisory to Americans in Russia on March 7, Watson said in a statement.

"ISIS bears sole responsibility for this attack. There was no Ukrainian involvement whatsoever," Watson said.

For his part, Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky said in his nightly video address on March 23 that Russian President Vladimir Putin was exploring ways to divert blame for the massacre.

"It's obvious that Putin and other thugs are just trying to blame someone else," he said. "Their methods are always the same. We've seen it all before, destroyed buildings and shootings and explosions. And they always find someone else to blame."

Chechen rebels slammed Russian secret services of being behind apartment bombings in Moscow, Buynkask, and Volgodonsk that killed more than 200 people in Russia in 1999. The acts were blamed on Chechens, prompting Putin, who was then prime minister, to deploy troops back to Chechnya.

A Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman said Zelensky was "the only head of state crazy enough to blame Russia for the terrorist attack."

Earlier, Putin said 11 people had been detained after the attack, including the four gunmen. "They tried to hide and moved towards Ukraine, where, according to preliminary data, a window was prepared for them on the Ukrainian side to cross the state border," he said.

Zelensky said Putin should use his own men to fight terrorism at home instead of staging a military operation in Ukraine.

"They have brought hundreds of thousands of their own terrorists here, on Ukrainian land, to fight



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against us, and they don't care about what is happening inside their own country," he said.

"Yesterday, as all this happened, instead of dealing with his fellow Russian citizens, addressing them, the wimp Putin was silent for a full 24 hours, thinking about how to tie this to Ukraine. It's all absolutely predictable," Zelensky said.

On his end, Putin on March 23 addressed the nation about the Crocus City Hall shooting, lambasting it as a "bloody and barbaric" terrorist attack and vowing to punish all involved. According to an update on March 24, 137 people have perished and scores have been wounded in Friday's massacre.

In his video address, Putin declared a national day of mourning on Sunday, March 24 to commemorate the victims of the attack.

Putin voiced his gratitude to all first responders, to law enforcement, and to ordinary citizens who helped the victims of the attack. The president underscored that another effort is underway, meant to prevent any further attacks.

"In Moscow and Moscow Region, in all regions of the country, additional anti-terrorism and anti-saboteur measures have been introduced," he announced, adding, "The main thing now is to prevent those who are behind this bloodbath from committing a new crime."

Vowing to punish all conspirators behind the attack, Putin noted that, so far, 11 suspects, including four perpetrators who directly participated in the shooting spree, have been detained. The attackers were caught fleeing "towards Ukraine, where, according to preliminary data, a window to cross the border was prepared on the Ukrainian side," he added.

"All perpetrators, organizers and masterminds behind this crime will get just and inevitable punishment. Whoever they are, whoever guides them. I repeat, we will identify and punish everyone who stands behind the terrorists, who prepared this atrocity, this attack on Russia, on our people," the president stated.

Meanwhile, the Russian ambassador in Washington, D.C., Anatoly Antonov, claimed that the United States has undermined its counterterrorism cooperation with Moscow. The diplomat added that joint work in this area had been among the major tenets of the partnership between the two nations.

The official's remark came shortly after the terrorist attack at the concert hall.

Earlier this month, the U.S. embassy in Moscow cautioned its citizens against attending large gatherings due to an imminent threat of a terrorist attack in the Russian capital.

In an article on March 24, RIA Novosti quoted Antonov as saying, "I've always reminded the Americans that our president [Vladimir Putin] was the first one to extend a hand to the Americans and stated readiness to provide assistance in 2001," alluding to the September 11 terrorist attacks.

He noted that "some things [in this cooperation] worked out ... and it is all destroyed today through no fault of our own."

In its March 7 alert, the U.S. embassy said that it was "monitoring reports that extremists have imminent plans to target large gatherings in Moscow, to include concerts." The embassy called on Americans to stay vigilant and "monitor local media for updates."

The embassies of several other nations followed suit.

Speaking to reporters hours after the terrorists attacked the Moscow concert venue, White House



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National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby pointed out that the warning earlier this month was not “related to this specific attack.”

“I’m not aware of any advance knowledge that we had of this,” the official added.



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